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THE
INSEPARABLE CONNEXION BETWEEN OBEDIENCE TO THE LAWS OF
CHRIST, AND THE COMFORTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

THE *Gray, Blackburn*
CIRCULAR LETTER,
FROM THE
MINISTERS AND MESSENGERS
OF THE SEVERAL
BAPTIST CHURCHES,
OF THE
Yorkshire and Lancashire
ASSOCIATION,

Assembled at Burslem, June 5th. and 6th.

1816.

MAINTAINING INVOLABLY, THE IMPORTANT DOCTRINES OF THREE EQUAL PERSONS IN THE GODHEAD; ETERNAL AND PERSONAL ELECTION; ORIGINAL SIN; PARTICULAR REDEMPTION; FREE JUSTIFICATION BY THE IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS OF CHRIST; EFFICACIOUS GRACE IN REGENERATION; THE FINAL PERSEVERANCE OF REAL BELIEVERS; THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD; THE ETERNAL HAPPINESS OF THE RIGHTEOUS; AND THE EVERLASTING MISERY OF SUCH AS DIE IMPENITENT; WITH THE CONGREGATIONAL ORDER OF THE CHURCHES:

To the several Churches which they represent—

MEETING AT

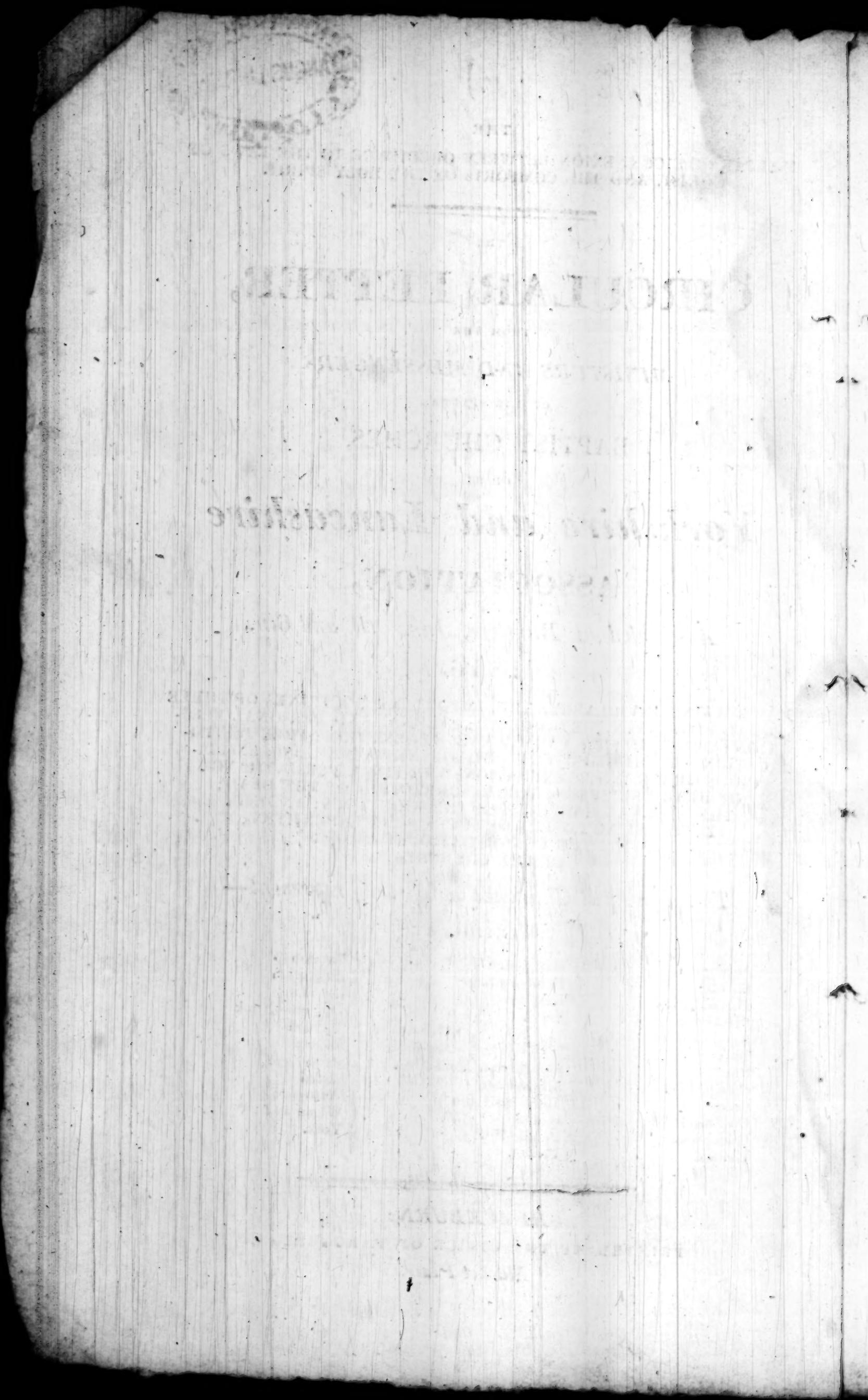
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CIRCULAR LETTER, &c.

Beloved Brethren,

THE Lord Jesus having called us by his grace, and having given us a place in his spiritual kingdom; having set us over you to watch for your souls, as those who must render an account to him on the great day of his appearing; we can say in sincerity, and without ostentation, that the great object of all our prayers to God for you, and of our addresses to you, either from the pulpit, or through the medium of the press, is, that you may be found perfect and complete in all the will of God; walking in all the commandments of the Lord blameless.

Adopting the language of Paul, to the Church at Thessalonica, we can ask you, in the sight of that God who knoweth our hearts, "what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? for ye are our glory and joy." By your stedfastness in the faith, and hope, and holiness of the gospel, we are comforted amidst the various difficulties with which we have to struggle; for now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord. These being our views of the office which we hold among you, and the strong desires which we feel for the promotion of your spiritual and eternal interests, your letters addressed to the Association this year, have been read by us, with the mingled sensations of joy and sorrow.

We thank our risen, ascended, and glorified Redeemer, for having added to almost all the Churches, during last year, such as, we trust, are saved in him with an everlasting salvation; for preserving the Churches in general in peace, love, and unity, and for enabling some of our brethren to finish their earthly course with joy. But over those of our number who have turned aside after satan, who have re-mingled with the world in crowding the broad path that leads to destruction, our souls shall weep in secret places, for the pride, obstinacy, and blindness of their hearts, and our eyes shall weep sore and run down with tears, because they suffer themselves to be led captive by the devil at his will. May the great, the merciful, and compassionate Shepherd of the sheep, look on such, bring them back to the fold from which they have strayed, that they may be saved, and go out and in and send pasture.

Being persuaded, brethren, that there is a close, a necessary, and an inseparable connexion, between a conscientious, a cheerful and persevering observance of the laws and institutions of Jesus Christ, and the consolations of the Holy Spirit, you will bear with us, while we call your attention, through the medium of this letter, to that important subject. In attempting to do so, it will be necessary, in the first place, to take a brief view of the leading laws of Christ's kingdom;—secondly, to prove from the Scriptures, that there is an inseparable connexion between obedience to them, and the consolations of the Holy Spirit;—thirdly, to assign some reasons for this connexion.

I. Let us take a brief view of the leading laws of the kingdom of Christ. And,

1. Our attention is naturally directed to that eternal rule of righteousness, commonly called the moral law. Christ our Lord and Lawgiver, has adopted this law, as the foundation law of his kingdom; has illustrated it in all its extent and spirituality in his sermon on the mount; and has enforced it, on all his disciples, by considerations, of all others the most eminently calculated to direct the understanding and judgment, to impress the conscience, and to move the affections and the heart. The moral law, from its very nature, must be eternal in its obligations. It is not like positive institutions, which rest entirely on the will of the institutor, and may be enforced or abrogated at his pleasure; but it has its origin in the nature of God, being a transcript of his holiness, justice and goodness, and is founded on the relation in which we stand to him as our Creator and Governor, and to one another, as possessed of the same common nature. Agreeably to this, our Lord sums up the whole law thus; "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, This is the first and great commandment; and the second is like unto it: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." It should seem, that all the absurd and destructive reasonings, which have been used by a certain class of hyper-evangelical writers, in order to set aside the moral law as a rule of life, have arisen from want of attention to the different meanings and applications of the *term law* in the New Testament. As it respects the ceremonial law, Christ has as completely delivered all the subjects of his kingdom from it, in all its branches, as a woman is delivered from the matrimonial bond, and all its engagements, by the death of her husband, (Rom. vii. 1—4.) Christ has also delivered his disciples from the moral law, as the ministration of condemnation, written and engraven in stone; but instead of having delivered them from an obligation to obey its precepts, one of the blessings of the new covenant, which was sealed and ratified by his precious blood, consists in writing them in their hearts, and putting them in their inward parts, (Jer. xxxi. 33. Heb. viii. 10.) But to come a little more closely to the point, let any one who trembles at the word of God, read the ten commands, as recorded in the twentieth chapter of Exodus, and ask himself at the end of each precept, whether as a disciple of Jesus Christ he is at liberty to violate it. Is the believer in Jesus at liberty to make a graven image, and fall down and worship it? Is he at liberty to take the name of the Lord his God in vain? to violate the sacred day of rest? to dishonor his father or his mother? to kill? to commit adultery? to steal? to bear false witness against his neighbour? to covet his neighbour's house, his wife, his man-servant, his maid-servant, his ox, his ass, or any thing that is his neighbour's? If these questions must be answered in the negative, how preposterous and absurd, to talk of not being under a law, which we cannot violate, without being guilty of an outrage against God, our neighbour, our conscience and common decency; and even against all the powerful and inconceivable ties and obligations of redemption through the blood of the Son of God! To deny the obligation of the moral law, is to contradict the faithful and true Witness; who declares that he came not to destroy the law and the Prophets, but to fulfil them. Did he fulfil them, that his disciples

might be at liberty to violate them? No, verily; for he adds, "Whoever, therefore, shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven;" but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven," (Matt. v. 17—19.) "Therefore all things, whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the Prophets." Again, we find the apostle Paul inculcating the precepts of the moral law on the believing Romans, as consisting in love to our neighbour, (Rom. xiii. 7—10.) Nor can any thing be more easy, than to trace every breach of duty, either as it respects God or our neighbour, to the want of the existence of that perfect love in the heart, which Paul declares to be the fulfilling of the law. In the estimation of the apostle Paul, and that too at a time when he found himself condemned by it, as a transgressor, the law was holy, just and good. And can any man, professing to be a disciple of Christ, be so completely lost to every idea of propriety, as to suppose, for a single moment, that Christ died to redeem him from an obligation to that which is holy, just and good!

Brethren, if the carnal mind is enmity against God; if it is not subject to the law of God neither indeed can be—let us consider the attempts of men to set aside the obligation of the moral law, as an awful evidence of the carnality of their hearts, of their enmity against the Lawgiver, and let us turn away from them, as being equal enemies, both to the Law and to the Gospel. The great Apostle of the Gentiles, who gloried in the cross of Christ, and in the doctrine of justification by faith without the deeds of the law, asks with an air of confidence and triumph, more than sufficient to silence, confound and overwhelm every man, who would attempt to set Christ and Moses in opposition to each other: Do we by faith make void the law? God forbid: yea we establish the law.

2. The moral law is so far from being abolished, or the rule of duty relaxed, under the gospel dispensation, that the latter is carried to a much higher degree of perfection, and spirituality, than under the old dispensation. The laws of Christ are suited to the nature of his kingdom, which is not of this world, and enjoin non-conformity to the world, in its pleasures, its maxims and pursuits; self-denial, the crucifixion of the old man with his affections and lusts, humility, meekness, patience under persecutions for the truth's sake, non-resistance of evil, forgiveness of injuries, and love of enemies. And these duties, are all enforced by Christ's own example, by his redeeming love, by the consideration of our state and character as pilgrims and strangers on earth, by all the misery of hell, and all the felicity of heaven. "For the grace of God, which bringeth salvation, hath appeared to all men, teaching us, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, even our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works." (Titus ii. 11—14.)

3. Another branch of the laws of Christ which claims peculiar attention, is that which enforces the relative duties of husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and servants, magistrates and subjects. "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is

the head of the Church : and he is the Saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Whose adorning, let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel ; but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is, in the sight of God, of great price." On husbands it is enjoined, that they " love their wives, even as Christ loved the Church, and gave himself for it.—So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies : he that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh : but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the Church.—Let every one of you in particular so love his wife, even as himself.—Be not bitter against them—dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour to the wife as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life ; that your prayers be not hindered, (Eph. v. 22—23. Col. iii—19. 1 Peter iii. 1—7.) Children obey your parents in the Lord ; for this is right. Honour thy father and mother ; which is the first commandment with promise ; that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth. And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath ; but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. (Eph. vi. 1—4.)

Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ :—Not with eye service as men-pleasures, but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart ; with good will, doing service as to the Lord, and not to men :—Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free. And ye masters, do the same things to them, forbearing threatening : knowing that your Master is in heaven ; neither is there respect of persons with him. (Eph. vi. 5—9.)

Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake : whether it be to the king as supreme : or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evil-doers, and for the praise of them that do well. For this is the will of God, that with well-doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men. As free, and not using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God. Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king, (1 Peter ii. 13—17. Rom. xiii. 1—8.)

Having briefly mentioned some of Christ's laws, which principally respect his disciples as individuals, and as members of civil society, we proceed to direct your attention to those, which have a special regard to their separation from the world, and their visible union and fellowship in a church capacity. And,

1. The nature, grounds, and peculiar privileges of this union, are beautifully stated by Paul, in the following passage : " There is one body and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism ; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all," Eph. iv. 4—6. As our happiness as individuals, very much depends on our rightly understanding, and implicitly and cheerfully obeying, those laws which Christ has given for the direction and government of our passions, our conduct, and conversation, in our individual capacity ; so our prosperity and consolation, our edification and increase as churches, solely depend, under God, on our rightly understanding the nature and

grounds of the union described by Paul in the above passage; the peculiar and reciprocal duties which naturally and necessarily arise from it, and the obligations under which we are laid by redeeming love, cheerfully and conscientiously to discharge them. As the perfection and beauty, the health and prosperity of the human body, depend on the mutual, the combined, and harmonious influence and symmetry of all its parts, so it is with the Church of Christ. Hence all the gifts, which Christ our exalted and living Head has graciously conferred on the different members of his body the Church, were not bestowed for the aggrandizement or emolument of the individuals who possess them, but for the mutual good, and prosperity of the whole body. Agreeably to this we have the following very striking passage: "He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things. And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love," (Eph. iv. 10—16.) See also (Rom. xii. 3—8. 1 Cor. xii. 4—28.)

2. Christ's *new commandment* constitutes the grand bond of Christian union, and consequently claims the most serious and affectionate attention of all the subjects of his kingdom. "A new commandment give I unto you, that ye love one another: as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another." (John xiii. 34, 35.) The love enforced by this commandment, is of a different kind, and far more extensive in degree, than the love enjoined by the moral law. The object of that love which is enforced by the moral law, is our neighbour, and our Lord has taught us in the parable of the good Samaritan, that wherever we see a human being in distress, we ought to view him as our neighbour, and are bound by the law, to do every thing in our power to relieve him. But the objects of the love which constitutes Christ's new commandment, are our Christian brethren, and the standard of our love to them, is not the love which we have to ourselves, but the love which Christ has to us. "Hereby (says the apostle John) perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."

The love of God is shed abroad in the heart of every believer, by the Holy Spirit; and its existence and exercise, are as essential to the Christian character, and to the being and prosperity of a church, as the free circulation of the blood is to the health of the human body. Love is the grand stimulating principle to the performance of the various duties connected with our individual, and united capacity, the proper discharge of which, is at once glorifying to God and beneficial to each other. It powerfully, but voluntarily constrains us, to weep with

those who weep, and to rejoice with them that rejoice: to bear one another's burdens, and so to fulfil the law of Christ. Hence nothing can, because nothing was ever intended by our great Lawgiver, to prove a proper substitute for the existence, and exercise, of love in a Christian church. A church may be very opulent, numerous, and respectable; but if this vital principle be wanting, it is no better in the estimation of him, whose eyes are as a flame of fire, and who cannot be imposed on by the most splendid external appearances, than a *whited sepulchre*.

3. Another important law of Christ's kingdom is, that which enjoins us, not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together. To encourage us to comply with this commandment, our Lord has graciously promised, that, where two or three are gathered together in his name, there will be in the midst of them. (Matt. xviii.—20.) And the apostle Jude declares, that those who separate themselves from the assemblies of the saints, are sensual, not having the Spirit. Now, if they do not possess the Spirit, they must, necessarily, be destitute of his consoling influences. The very idea, indeed, of a church that does not assemble together, is a nonentity, and involves a contradiction in terms. Hence, by parity of reasoning, every person professedly a member of a Christian church, who, on the most trivial pretences, absents himself from the meetings of his brethren, despises his own mercies, robs himself of spiritual comfort, acts inconsistently with his professed character, and is unworthy of a place in the kingdom of Christ.

4. The day on which, as Churches, we are to assemble, claims our attention. After God had finished the works of creation, he is said to have rested on the seventh day, and blessed and sanctified it. A seventh part of man's time was thus set apart for the worship and service of his Creator, and the concerns of his own soul. Under the New Testament dispensation, although there is evidently a change of the day, from the *seventh* to the *first*, the original appointment is unalterably the same. Accordingly, we find the apostolic Churches uniformly meeting together on the first day of the week; and as they were collected and formed by the inspired apostles of Christ, and under their immediate direction, this part of their approved practice must have originated in apostolic injunction; and, consequently, must be equally binding on all the Churches of Christ, to the end of time, as the most explicit precept. The limits of this letter will not admit of entering into any thing like a minute statement or illustration, either of this or any other of the commandments to which we have directed your attention; and, therefore, we dismiss it with this observation:—
That were we to speak from actual experience and general observation, we would say, that it clearly appears to us, that all the objections which have ever been started against the sanctification of the whole of the first day of the week, have arisen, rather from a disinclination to the spiritual exercises in which the people of God engage on that day, and a strong predilection to worldly business and idle amusements, than from a fear of being appalled at last by the Judge of the world, with the question, 'who hath required this at your hand?'

5. The next thing that demands notice, is the end for which the disciples of Jesus are to meet on the first day of the week. A full and satisfactory account of this will be found in the following passage:—
'Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day were added unto them three thousand souls. And they continued

stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine, and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers; praising God," &c. (Acts ii. 41, 42.) These ordinances evidently constituted the worship of the apostolic Churches, and are enforced by Christ on all his disciples, in their associated capacity, as tests of their obedience, sources of their edification and spiritual consolation, and as means for promoting their separation from the world, and their conformity to himself in heart and life. Now, if the means are neglected, we at once deceive our own souls, and impeach the wisdom and goodness of our Lawgiver, by presuming to expect the end.

6. The last branch of the laws of Christ to which we refer you at present, is that which respects the ordinance of discipline, and the proper mode of treating offences. By consulting the eighteenth chapter of Matthew, and the fifth chapter of the first epistle to the Corinthians, you will receive complete and satisfactory information respecting this subject. If discipline be neglected in a church, it will be impossible to attend to any of the other ordinances of Christ in a proper manner. For when improper persons are received into a church, or retained in it after they have been discovered, the temple of God will be thereby defiled, its fellowship with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ will be interrupted, the Holy Spirit will be grieved, and, consequently, its unity, peace, and comfort entirely destroyed. We shall conclude this part of the subject, by observing; that mere external services when considered in themselves, have no intrinsic moral worth or beauty; they belong to religion as visible expressions of internal sentiments. To give the labour of the body, therefore, without the heart, the honour of the lips, without the corresponding affections of the mind, is to present an image to God, instead of a living man; it is to offer the skin of an animal in sacrifice, while the flesh and substance are consumed by an unhallowed fire. But if to serve God with the body without the soul is a deceitful worship, and an unprofitable service; so, to pretend to an elevation and spirituality of devotion, which supersedes the necessity of all outward expressions of piety and bodily worship, is to act in contradiction to the nature of man, and to disobey the ordinance of God.

II. We proceed to prove from the sacred Scriptures, that there is an inseparable connexion, between obedience to these laws, and the comforts of the Holy Spirit. Under the Old Testament economy, God in general rewarded the obedience of his people with temporal prosperity, and punished their obedience with temporal judgments. Addressing ancient Israel, he says, " You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore will I punish you for all your iniquities," (Amos iii. 2.) It seems to have been the connexion between obedience and prosperity; and disobedience and temporal calamity, which led the friends of Job, when they saw him so severely afflicted, to conclude that he behaved to be a hypocrite; and which made David stumble when he saw the prosperity of the wicked, (Job iv. 7—9. xxxvi. 10—14. Psalm lxxiii. 12—17. Under the gospel dispensation, God rewards the obedience of his people with joy and peace in believing, with the animating and consoling influences of the Spirit of adoption, with liberty of access to the throne of grace, with enabling them as brethren to dwell together in unity, and with animating their minds, amidst all the trials and afflictions of this life, by the lively and well grounded hope of pure and uninterrupted felicity in his presence,

where is fulness of joy, and at his right hand, where are pleasures forever more. Agreeably to this, we find that the comforts of the Holy Spirit are always promised as the reward of obedience, and are associated together in the recorded experience of the children of God. "Great peace have they," says David, "who love thy law, and nothing shall offend them." (Psalm cxix.—165.) "Thus saith the Lord, thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel, 'I am the Lord thy God, who teacheth thee to profit, who leadeth thee by the way that thou shouldest go. Oh that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments! then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea,'" (Isaiah xlviii. 17, 18.)

Our blessed Lord after setting his disciples an example of discharging to each other the most humbling and self-denied duties, thus addresses them; "If ye know these things, *happy* are ye if you *do* them. If you love me, keep my commandments, and I will pray the Father, and he will give you another comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him; but ye know him, for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is who loveth me; and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him. Judas saith unto him, (not Iscariot,) 'Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself to us, and not unto the world?' Jesus answered and said to him; 'If a man love me, he will keep my words, and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.' *These things have I spoken to you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.*" (John xiii. 18—17, xiv. 15—23, xv. 7—11. James i. 21—25.)

Nothing can be more evident, from these passages, than that our Lord makes the enjoyment of the consoling influences of the Holy Spirit to depend on obedience to his commandments. Again, he says, "I am the light of the world, he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." (John viii. 12.) What is it then to follow him? It is to imitate him in all his imitable perfections, and to yield a cheerful, conscientious, and persevering obedience to his laws and institutions; and, if we do so, we shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life. With this agrees the recorded experience of the people of God in all ages. When was it that the Church at Jerusalem eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, and enjoyed the Holy Spirit, in all his enlightening, comforting, and animating influences? Was it not while they continued steadfast in the apostles' doctrine, and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers! Observe, also, how closely connected walking in the fear of the Lord, is with the *comfort* of the Holy Spirit, in the following passage: "Then had the Churches rest throughout all Judea, and Galilee, and Samaria, and were edified; and, walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, were multiplied.

The inseparable connexion between obedience and comfort, will become still more evident, when we consider, that spiritual darkness, and the hiding of God's face from his people, are declared to be the effects and the punishment of their disobedience. "Behold! the Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save, neither is his ear heavy that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you that he

will not hear. Therefore is judgment far from us, neither doth justice overtake us ; we wait for light, but behold obscurity ! for brightness, but we walk in darkness. We grope for the wall like the blind, and we grope as if we had no eyes : we stumble at noon day as in the night ; we are in desolate places, as dead men. We roar like bears, and mourn sore like doves ; we look for judgment, but there is none ; for salvation, but it is far off from us ; for our transgressions are multiplied before thee, and our sins testify against us." (Isaiah lix. 1—12. Psalm lxxxix. 30—33. Jer. ii. 19.)

To what cause soever some persons may be inclined to ascribe their want of consolation, it is sufficiently evident, both to themselves and others, that they do want it ; and if this is the case, there must necessarily be a cause ; and if there is a cause, it must be of great importance for them to know what it is. The slightest attention to the New Testament, will be sufficient to convince any one, that the spiritual darkness and distress, the doubts and fears, the complaints and despondency, of a great proportion of professing Christians, in the present day, form a complete contrast to the pure and steady light, the holy confidence, the lively hope, the heavenly joy and peace of the primitive Christians. Their outward circumstances were ten thousand times more calculated to depress, and overwhelm their spirits than ours are ; but they considered the persecutions to which they were exposed for the truth's sake, as an honour, conferred on them, by their Lord and Saviour, and in open defiance of all that men or devils could either devise, or inflict, they rejoiced in the hope of the heavenly inheritance, with joy unspeakable and full of glory, (1 Peter i. 3—9.) Now, as every believer in the Son of God, has at present, the very same sources of consolation that the first disciples had, it surely becomes a question of considerable moment, how is this manifest diversity, as it respects spiritual consolation, to be accounted for ? Some endeavour to solve this question, by ascribing the darkness and distress of mind, so prevalent among Christians in the present day, solely to Divine Sovereignty ;* and others go to the opposite extreme, and conclude, whenever they find a person in a state of despondency, that his distress must be the effect of wilful disobedience to the authority of God. It is evident, however, that the doubts and despondency of many, are to be viewed as the effects of a relaxed and debilitated state of their nervous system. While we therefore maintain the inseparable connexion between obedience to the laws of Christ, and the comforts of the Holy Spirit, and tell those, who are living in the practice of known sin, or in the neglect of known duty, that they are suffering the necessary effects of their wilful disobedience ; let us not confound things which differ, by involving in the same charge, persons whose want of consolation, may be clearly traced to constitutional

* It may be necessary for the writer, to exonerate his conscience by stating, that in this letter, as read to the Association, he expressed his decided disapprobation of this view of the subject ; and shewed at some length, that what is called spiritual desertion, or distress of mind, except in cases where it seems to be the effect of constitutional weakness, or mental derangement, is expressly and uniformly declared in the sacred Scriptures, to be the fruit and the punishment of sin. Nor can he, after the most mature consideration of the subject, conceive it possible, on any other principle, to establish the inseparable connexion between obedience to the laws of Christ, and the comforts of the Holy Spirit. But the majority of his brethren in the Association, being of a different opinion, and as they as a body, and not he, are responsible for the sentiments which this letter contains, he agreed to suppress, at present, what he had written on this part of the subject.

weakness, or temporary derangement of mind. The following remarks, of a truly judicious and able writer, are so applicable to our present purpose, that we cannot deny ourselves the pleasure of transcribing them. Speaking of the comfort of the Holy Spirit, he says: "Where this joy, then, is wanting, or deficient, its deficiency or its absence must arise, I should apprehend, from one or other of three causes. *In the first place*, constitutional distemper in body, or mind, or, by reciprocal influence, in both:—in which case, the patient stands in need of the counsel and aid of the physician, as much as of the minister of the gospel, and the Christian friend; and very frequently the exertions of all the three fail of the desired success:—*Secondly*, erroneous or defective views of divine truth: either, for example, a want of sufficiently clear and simple conceptions of the nature of the gospel, or the unbounded riches and absolute freedom of the grace which it reveals, and of the simplicity of that faith by which sinners obtain an interest in its blessings; or a want of extensive and properly digested knowledge; confusion of ideas—contracted, partial, and inconsistent views of the scheme of redemption, and of the general system of revealed doctrine, by which a man is necessarily exposed to be "soon shaken in mind," and consequently to perpetual fluctuation of feeling:—Or, *thirdly*, departure from God, either in open or secret sin; backsliding in *life*, or at least in *heart*; for there may be a great deal of the latter, where, in the sight of fellow-creatures, there is very little of the former. The joy of God's salvation is a *holy* joy; not to be found in the ways of sin; not to be experienced in an evil heart of unbelief, departing from the living God."* As it must be of importance, for persons in spiritual darkness, to be made acquainted with the source from which their distress issues, it can be no less so for those who are called to deal with such people, to know how they ought to treat them. The patient may be ignorant both of the nature and cause of his distemper; but it is always expected that the physician, before he begins to prescribe, should be well acquainted with both; and if he is not, it is not very likely that he can effect a cure. Instead, then, of endeavouring to persuade persons, in the situation referred to, that they are not so bad as they imagine themselves to be, or of directing them to their past experience of the Lord's kindness, as sufficient evidence of the safety of their state, would it not be better to deal with them, as God in his word does, by calling on them, to search, and to try their ways, and turn to the Lord: reminding them of the mercy of God to the chief of sinners, of the sufficiency of Christ's atonement, of his never failing intercession within the veil, and especially, of those calls which are addressed to the servants of God, as having gone astray from him the fountain of living waters? This mode of treatment, is of all others, the most likely to have the desired effect. "Return, ye backsliding children, saith the Lord, and I will heal your backslidings: behold, we come unto thee, for thou art the Lord our God." (Jer. iii. 22—25.

III. We proceed to assign some reasons for the inseparable connexion between obedience and comfort. And,

1. If we contemplate, for a moment, the nature and perfections, the

* "Wardlaw on the Socinian Controversy:" A work which will well reward the serious perusal of every disciple of Jesus Christ.

character and government of God, we shall be convinced, that the happiness of a rational being in a state of enmity and rebellion against him, is absolutely impossible: "Jehovah is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, and cannot look on sin, but with abhorrence." Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with him? To expect to enjoy the consolations of the Holy Spirit, while living in known sin, argues, not only the greatest ignorance and self-deception, but such an expectation stands directly opposed to the established order of the moral government of God. The glory of the divine countenance, the authority of the divine will, the majesty of all the perfections of God, is opposed to every step of the sinner's fatal course. How dreadful is the following passage! "If there should be among you man, or woman, or family, or tribe, whose heart turneth away this day from the Lord our God, to go and serve the gods of these nations; if there should be among you, a root that beareth gall and wormwood; and it come to pass, when he heareth the words of this curse, that he bless himself in his heart, saying, 'I shall have *peace*, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart, to add drunkenness to thirst:' the Lord shall not spare him; but the anger of the Lord and his jealousy shall smoke against that man, and all the curses that are written in this book shall lie upon him, and the Lord shall blot out his name from under heaven." (Deut. xxix. 18—20.) An important part of the Holy Spirit's consolations, consists in the enjoyment of fellowship with God: but if we say we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanseth us from all sin. Let all, therefore, who name the name of Christ, and would enjoy the comfort of the Holy Spirit, depart from iniquity. Let them follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord; and, receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let them have grace, whereby they may serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear, for *our* God is a consuming fire.

2. The nature and design of Christ's laws will furnish another reason for the inseparable connexion between obedience to them and the comforts of the Holy Spirit. They are not to be viewed as the dogmas of a tyrannical despot, which are, too frequently, the mere volitions of ignorance, under the direction of cruelty and caprice. The laws of Jesus are the emanations of infinite wisdom, flowing from unbounded goodness, mercy, and love. They have all for their object the promotion of his own glory, in the most intimate connexion with the real happiness of all the subjects of his kingdom. It is as impossible to obey them without being happy, as it is to violate them without being miserable. There is precisely the same connexion between obedience to them and the consolations of the Holy Spirit, as there is between necessary food and a proper discharge of the animal functions, and a healthful state of body. The man who loathes, and refuses to feed on the provision, which the great Redeemer, in wisdom and mercy, has made for Zion, shall as assuredly decline in spiritual comfort and prosperity, as the body of that man must decline who loathes his necessary food. These observations will apply with equal force to the laws of Christ, either as a whole, or taken separately: and, consequently, the consolation of the true believer will always be found to bear an exact proportion to the extent of his obedience.

3. Another reason for the connexion which we are endeavouring to establish, will be found in the nature and operations of that sacred agent, who, by way of eminence, is styled 'the Comforter.' In relation to his own nature, he is called 'the Holy Spirit ;' and, as it respects his operations on the minds of men, he is denominated, 'the Spirit of holiness.' Being infinitely holy in his own nature, he powerfully, but sweetly constrains all who are the subjects of his blessed influences, to the most cheerful and unwearied obedience to the will of Christ. Whatever degree of holiness or spiritual joy, (its inseparable attendant), any of the sons or daughters of Adam possess, is, in the Holy Scriptures, declared to be the effect of the Spirit's operations; for the fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, against which there is no law. The Holy Spirit comforts the disciples of Jesus, by enabling them to approach the throne of grace through the rent vail of his flesh, crying 'Abba, Father.' But the knowledge of God as our Father, is incompatible with disobedience. A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master. 'If I then,' says Jehovah, 'be a father, where is mine honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear?' And Paul exhorts us *to do all things without murmurings and disputings.* But why? That we may be blameless and harmless, *the sons of God* without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom we should shine as lights in the world.' Another source of the believer's comfort, is the love of God, which is shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Spirit, who is given to him; but this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments; and his commandments are not grievous. Christians are said to abound in hope, even the hope of the glory of God, by the power of the Holy Spirit; but every man that hath this hope in Christ, purifieth himself even as he is pure. We, therefore, conclude, from the very nature and operations of the Holy Spirit, that his consolations can never be enjoyed, but in connexion with obedience to the laws of Christ.

4. Sin darkens the understanding, alienates the heart and affections from God, sears the conscience, as with a hot iron, and renders the sinner absolutely incapable of either desiring or enjoying the consolations of the Holy Spirit. By procrastination, evil tempers, worldly cares, and by expedient indulgencies, men are represented as resisting and quenching the Holy Spirit, (Acts vii. 51—53. 1 Thess. v. 19.) Hence, Paul exhorts Christians to lay aside all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour, evil speaking and malice, that they may not grieve the Holy Spirit of promise, by whom they are sealed to the day of redemption, (Eph. iv. 25—31.) There is therefore no consolation in Christ, no comfort of love, no fellowship of the Spirit; but in connexion with our standing fast in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel; the faith once delivered to the saints. But to conclude; how do matters stand with us brethren? Are we as Churches and individuals walking in the fears of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit? or are the consolations of God small with us? If the former be our state, let us go on to increase our joy in the Lord, by increasing obedience to his holy will, and conformity to his moral image. But if the latter be our condition, there is a cause, and that cause, as we have been endeavouring to prove, is disobedience. Is our peace of mind broken? our joy in the Lord marred? have we no enjoyment in the delightful exercises of

prayer and praise ? are we become heartless and slothful in the path of duty ? are there any among us to whom the Lord's day and its exercises are a weariness, who have changed it into a day of idle relaxation, and who, instead of meeting regularly with their brethren for the worship of God, prefer paying and receiving visits from worldly, ungodly people ? are any of our Churches corrupted, divided, and barren ? surely God hideth his face, and our situation is a deplorable compound of guilt and misery. But however it may be with us, God is always the same to them who love and serve him. He is the Father of lights, from whom cometh every good and perfect gift ; and with whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. He has the same attachment to his people, and stands in exactly the same relation to them as ever. Jesus, the consolation of Israel, is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. His atonement is as sufficient at this moment, as when he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost. His intercession is as powerful now, as it was on the day when he entered within the veil of the heavenly sanctuary, with his own blood. The promises of the gospel are as exceedingly great, and precious, as ever; and the Holy Spirit is still the Comforter, whether we be comforted or not. Professors of religion are often heard to complain of darkness and insensibility to divine things, of cold affections and ineffective desires, and they seem to regard these as mere infirmities, which it is decent and becoming to lament ; but against which they are not bound to seek a remedy. But how can any one be sure that he possesses the faith of the gospel, when he is without any evidence of its working by love, purifying the heart, and overcoming the world ? If these, its necessary effects, are veiled in so much obscurity and imperfection, ou'lt he not reasonably to question the reality, and even the very existence of the thing itself ? To deplore the prevalence of these evils, day by day, without faithfully using the means which God has appointed for delivering us from them, neither evinces sincerity, nor contributes to safety ; nor can the abundant grace of the gospel save that man, who, instead of applying it as a sovereign remedy against his corruptions, uses it only as the instrument for cherishing an audacious confidence. When we, therefore, see an habitual seriousness exchanged for levity and trifling, diligent watchfulness succeeded by sloth and negligence, a lively fear superseded by irreverent boldness, when fervent devotion has sunk into cold indifference, and loving kindness and charity are absorbed by private interest and self-complacency ; there is a decline in the moral constitution of the soul, a sad defection from God and goodness, a state so nearly resembling that of a hypocrite, that it highly becomes us, to sound in the ears of such persons, the alarming admonition addressed to the Church at Ephesus, " Remember, therefore, from whence thou hast fallen, and repent, and do thy first works, or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of its place, except thou repent." There are many who regularly attend all our places of worship ; who cheerfully contribute of their substance, for the advancement of the Redeemer's kingdom ; but who are prevented, either by timidity, shame, or by the idea that they are not good enough, from openly professing Christ, and joining with us, in observing his social institutions. Brethren, how long do you intend to halt between two opinions ? to resist the authority of the great Redeemer, the convictions of your consciences, the entreaties of your best friends, and to despise your own mercies ? Do

you believe that he shed his precious blood for you ; and are you either ashamed or afraid to confess him before men ? Or if you do not think yourselves good enough to occupy a place in his kingdom on earth, how do you expect to be fitted for a place in his kingdom in heaven ? Is it by living in disobedience to his authority, and despising the means which he has appointed for promoting the edification, the comfort, and holiness of his people ? Surely not. If there is an inseparable connexion between obedience to the laws of Christ, and the consolations of the Holy Spirit, (which, we humbly hope, has been made sufficiently apparent,) it is morally impossible that you, in your present situation, can enjoy these consolations. Being anxious to promote your present and everlasting consolation, permit us, with all the affection and earnestness of which we are capable, to call on you, in the name of our exalted Redeemer, to take up his cross, and follow him in the path of his commandments, that you may find rest to your souls.

Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report ; if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think on these things. " Those things," says Paul, " which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do ; and the God of love and peace shall be with you." (Phil. iv. 8, 9.)

Minutes, &c.

Wednesday, June 5th.—The ministers met at ten o'clock, forenoon, to arrange the business of the Association. Met at two o'clock same day; brother Beetham prayed, brother Lister was chosen Moderator, the letters from the Churches were read, and brother Mann concluded with prayer. Met again at six o'clock in the evening; brother Hargreaves prayed, brother Lister preached, from 2 Tim. ii. 8, and brother Sinclair concluded with prayer.—Thursday, half-past six o'clock in the morning, met for prayer; brethren Trickett and Scarlet engaged; brother Gray read the Circular Letter, and brother Lister closed the meeting by prayer. Met again at ten o'clock, forenoon, at the large Methodist Chapel; brother Edwards prayed, brother Stephens preached, from 2 Tim. ii. 19. and brother Steadman from Isaiah liii. 11.; brother Sleigh, concluded with prayer.

The following Resolutions were then moved and passed.

1. That the Letter, written and read by brother Gray, be adopted by the Association and printed.
2. That the next Association be held at Blackburn, on the Wednesday and Thursday in Whitsun-Week, to put up at Mr. Holden's, sign of the Duke of York, Darwen-street. Brethren Stephens, Fisher, Lister, and Hargreaves, to preach; and in case of failure, brethren Steadman, Hyde, and Mann.
3. That the Circular Letter for next year, be on the sin against the Holy Ghost, and that brother Steadman be requested to draw it up.
4. That a book be kept, in future, for entering the Minutes of the Association.
5. That Dr. Steadman be appointed Secretary to the Association, and enter the Minutes according to the above resolution.
6. That any Church, omitting to send a letter, or messenger, to the Association, be written to by the Secretary, and if omitted a second time, that Church shall be considered as excluded from the Association.
7. That the thanks of the Association be given to the Methodist friends at Burslem, for obliging them with the use of their large Chapel.
8. That the thanks of this meeting be given to the friends of *all* denominations at Burslem, for the comfortable accommodations which they have afforded to those from a distance, who have attended on this occasion.
9. That all subjects proposed for the Circular Letter, be communicated through the medium of the Moderator.

State of the Churches since the last Association.

<i>Churches in the Association.</i>	<i>Pastors of the Churches.</i>	<i>Increase</i>	<i>Decrease</i>	<i>Number of Members.</i>
		<i>By Baptism.</i>	<i>By Death.</i>	
		<i>Letter.</i>	<i>Dismissal.</i>	<i>Exclusion.</i>
Accrington	Edwards	3	1	119
Bacup	Dyer	5	3	98
Barnoldswick	Smith	6	1	51
Blackburn	Gray	4	—	43
Bradford	Steadman	9	1	219
Bramley	Trickett	2	—	108
Burslem	Thompson	3	1	42
Clough-Fold	Heworth	No Letter.	—	—
Colne		1	—	31
Cowling-Hill	Shuttleworth	No Letter.	—	—
Gildersome	Scarlet	4	2	27
Halifax	Ackroyd	No Letter.	—	—
Haslingden	Maden	6	—	36
Hebden-Bridge	Fawcett	7	6	116
Keighley	Shaw	2	3	23
Leeds	Langdon	1	1	62
Liverpool, { Byrom-street	Fisher	7	3	192
Liverpool, { Lime-street	Lister	12	1	120
Manchester	Stephens	14	1	91
Masborough	Hudson	3	8	47
Meltham-House	No Letter.	—	—	—
Ogden	Hargreaves	—	2	78
Pendle-Hill		—	1	30
Preston		5	2	20
Rawden		6	2	28
Rushworth	Miller	—	1	41
Rochdale	Littlewood	—	2	102
Salendine-Nook	Hyde	5	4	123
Sheffield		16	3	99
Shipley	Mann	17	1	84
Steep-Lane	Mills	5	—	35
Sutton		—	1	48
Wainsgate	Holroyd	3	—	29
Wigan	Symmons	1	—	19
York		2	—	18
		149	18	2180
	<i>Increase. By Baptism</i>	149	<i>Decrease. By Death</i>	57
	<i>Letter</i>	18	<i>Dismissal</i>	8
	<i>Restoration</i>	4	<i>Exclusion</i>	21
	<i>Total.</i>	171	<i>Total.</i>	86
	<i>Clear increase 85.</i>			

FINIS.